

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 11

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
14 APRIL 1983

One volunteer takes jab at Reagan policy

By Daniel Southerland
Staff correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor

Washington
Operation California, one of Hollywood's favorite international relief organizations, is in many ways ideally suited to be receiving an award from President Reagan. The only problem for Mr. Reagan was that on award day, Richard Walden, the outspoken president and executive director of Op Cal, as it is sometimes called, decided to take a jab at the President's Nicaragua policy.

The youthful-looking, bespectacled Mr. Walden diplomatically held his fire during the luncheon that the President offered in the White House East Room Wednesday to the 20 winners of the President's Volunteer Action Awards. But when he stepped out on the White House lawn to talk with reporters, Mr. Walden said that one of his next moves would be to try to help civilian war victims displaced by the guerrillas now fighting the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. The guerrillas are widely reported to have the support of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

"This government's hands are no cleaner than any other government's," he said, "And innocent people, mainly children, are constantly being victimized by superpower interference on both sides."

Walden and a friend first organized the Beverly Hills-based Operation California in June 1979 to respond to needs of the Vietnamese "boat people." Despite its small size — it currently has only four staff workers — Op Cal quickly became the largest carrier of "in-kind" donations from private corporations for

international relief. Walden and his associates have flown more than \$12 million worth of food and other goods to the needy on three continents.

President Reagan has urged the private sector do more in the field of foreign aid, and Walden agrees that much more can be done. Shunning government help whenever possible, he and his co-workers go directly to American corporations. Walden says that his experience shows that a minute percentage of routinely accumulated surpluses from only 50 private companies would be enough to satisfy the needs of the world's millions of refugees and other displaced persons.

In addition, Op Cal has attracted a great deal of assistance from Hollywood personalities, foremost among them Julie Andrews and her husband, Blake Edwards. It was Miss Andrews who nominated Op Cal for the President's Volunteer Action Award.

Walden said that the three references given to the awards selection committee included two influential Republican donors to his organization and a friend of the President's wife, Nancy Reagan.

Walden's brash style sometimes annoys government officials and the members of some other voluntary organizations. But even his detractors admit that he gets things done, often for less than it might cost to send relief through larger groups.

Walden was an antiwar activist during college and law school, worked for Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York, for the American Civil Liberties Union, and for American Indians during the negotiations with the Nixon administration over Wounded Knee. He ended up in California pushing for reform of state health agencies. He and a friend organized the first of Op Cal's flights in 1979 almost on a whim. It was the first American relief flight to Southeast Asian refugee camps. Walden wanted to demonstrate that private individuals could do something to help the boat people who were streaming out of Vietnam.